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ABSTRACT

An overview of the use of part-time teachers in adult and postsecondary education is presented. It is stated that adult and postsecondary institutions have found that the extensive use of part-time teachers helps to fulfill the needs for maintaining current, relevant training programs in new and emerging occupations; for providing training programs on an occasional, on-demand basis; and for offering ongoing programs for which low enrollments are anticipated. Topics covered in this digest include: (1) trends in and statistics on the use of part-time teachers; (2) benefits of part-time teaching for the individual and for the institution; (3) employment characteristics and training needs of part-time teachers; and (4) approaches to strengthening the quality of part-time teachers including orientation, professional development, and evaluation and supervision. This digest includes a five-item bibliography of references, two of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system. (DC)

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Overview: ERIC Digest No. 30.

by

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO. 30

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

PART-TIME TEACHERS IN ADULT AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The Importance of Part-Time Teachers

Part-time teachers are used extensively in adult and postsecondary vocational education programs. Educational institutions have found that the use of part-time teachers helps to meet such institutional needs as the need to maintain current, relevant training programs in new and emerging occupational areas; the need to provide training programs on an occasional, on-demand basis; and the need to offer ongoing programs for which low enrollments are anticipated. Because the use of part-time teachers is increasing, postsecondary and adult educational institutions need to develop guidelines to ensure the quality of instruction provided by part-time teachers, the availability of support services for part-time teachers, and the equity of pay and benefits for part-time teachers (Guthrie-Morse 1981).

Trends in Use of Part-Time Teachers

The use of part-time teachers in postsecondary educational institutions has increased in recent years, and projections indicate that this trend will continue. The reasons for this increase include a leveling-off of student enrollments, increased demand for education by adults, increased interest in nontraditional, noncredit education, and changes in the occupational structure.

- An analysis of the use of part-time teachers in American colleges and universities indicates that "about 210,000-215,000 part-time instructors are currently at work, and that they comprise about one-third of all faculty members at colleges and universities" (Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne 1982, p. 19).
- Part-time teachers are used most heavily at the community college level. In 1976, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges reported that 55.8 percent of community college instructors were part-time (ibid.).
- The National Center for Education Statistics reports that a dramatic change in the use of part-time instructors in higher education occurred between 1972 and 1977. Whereas in 1972 there were 3.17 full-time teachers for every part-time teacher, by 1977 there were only 1.26 full-time teachers for every part-time teacher (ibid.).
- The use of part-time teachers will probably continue to increase in the future as the number of full-time teachers remains constant because of reduced levels of funding, and as the increase in adult students results in a higher demand for nontraditional programs.
- Part-time teachers are used most heavily in short-term, nontraditional, and noncredit programs. In these areas, part-time teachers are particularly attractive because their use can help the institution develop diverse expertise without having to make long-term employment commitments.

Advantages of Using Part-Time Teachers

The use of part-time teachers has potential benefits for both the individual and for the institution. Benefits for the individuals include the following:

- Part-time teachers accrue certain intrinsic rewards from the teaching activity, including contact with professional role models, an opportunity to keep updated on new developments in their field, and the development of a wider circle of social and professional contacts.
- Part-time employment may serve to reduce unemployment levels for teachers. Increasing part-time work distributes the total amount of work in specific occupational fields across a larger pool of individuals.
- Part-time teaching opportunities may be attractive to qualified people who are not usually available for full-time employment. Retirees who wish limited employment are attracted to part-time and part-year teaching activities. Parents with young children find part-time teaching a viable way to maintain their careers while devoting major effort to household and childrearing activities.

Benefits for the institutions are as follows:

- Administrators find that the use of part-time teachers can reduce overloading of full-time staff with the resulting benefits of reduced overtime payments, higher productivity, and reduced absenteeism.
- Use of part-time teachers in adult and postsecondary education is a means of increasing curriculum adaptability. Rapidly changing technology and labor market trends have created subsequent shifts in the demand for new educational programs and for teachers with new skills and competencies.
- Increased use of part-time teachers in educational settings may help to revitalize the existing teaching force. As enrollments have declined, the years of tenure of existing teaching staff have increased. This can result in a teaching staff that lacks some of the areas of expertise demanded by students. The use of younger, part-time teachers is a way of infusing new vitality and knowledge into the educational setting.

Characteristics and Needs of Part-Time Teachers

Part-time teachers include people from diverse backgrounds. Tuckman (1978) presents a taxonomy that includes semiretired people who want to work part-time, graduate students who are teaching on a part-time basis,

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qualified experts who are teaching part-time in hopes of obtaining full-time employment in the institution, people who hold full-time jobs elsewhere while teaching part-time, individuals who hold several part-time jobs, and homemakers who teach part-time so they can also have time to take care of a relative or child.

Because many part-time teachers lack formal teacher education and have limited teaching experiences, they need to develop and/or improve their instructional skills. Pucel, Welsh, and Ross (1978) suggest that competency areas important for part-time teachers are knowledge and skills in course planning, instruction, classroom/student management, media, evaluation, working with special populations, and working with adults. In addition, part-time teachers need to be oriented to the institution and the curriculum, and need ongoing evaluation, supervision, and linkage to the full-time teaching staff.

Strengthening the Quality of Part-Time Teachers

Orientation

It is important to orient part-time teachers to the educational institution and to the specific program in which they will teach. Experience indicates that comprehensive orientation often does not occur. However, several practices have been helpful in improving the quality of part-time teacher orientation. First, the responsibility for orientation should be assigned to a specific individual either at the institutional or departmental level to ensure coordination and continuity of part-time teacher orientation. Other strategies might include the development of a handbook that describes institutional policies and curriculum, informal orientation meetings scheduled at times that are convenient for part-time teachers, and the assignment of full-time instructors to be mentors to part-time teachers.

Professional Development

Since many part-time instructors do not have formal training in education, professional development is a particularly important area. Goetsch (1978) suggests several techniques that can be used for inservice training of part-time instructors. One promising model has been to develop a pool of part-time teachers to whom the institution has a long-term commitment, and to provide intensive training for these individuals. Other approaches include the use of competency-based teacher education materials, computer-based instruction, outreach activities at off-campus sites convenient for part-time instructors, intensive professional development workshops in conjunction with professional association meetings, individualized instructional materials, and special courses for part-time teachers offered by teacher education institutions.

Evaluation and Supervision

Evaluation results indicate that part-time teachers often lack an understanding of the sequencing and important concepts of the curriculum, and may be out-of-phase with full-time instructors who teach other sections of the same course. Another criticism has been that part-time instructors are less vigorous in the standards they set for student performance. These concerns underscore the importance of the ongoing evaluation and supervision of part-time teachers. A variety of evaluation techniques have been used, including classroom observation by administrators or full-time faculty, students' evaluations of teachers, and critiques of videotaped segments of part-time teacher instruction. Supervision and evaluation depend on the availability of time for qualified instructors to work with part-time teachers. Techniques that have helped to support this supervision process are assigning part-time teachers to full-time teacher mentors and providing released time for full-time teachers to supervise part-time teachers.

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